

# News story: Multi-million pound fund to support disadvantaged children in the early years

Parents who need help teaching their children reading, writing and language skills will get practical help such as home visits and online tools thanks to a £6.5 million scheme announced today (1 July).

Voluntary and community groups will get a share of the multi-million pound fund to run projects that help disadvantaged families and children with additional needs, building on the free childcare offer already available to the most deprived two-year-olds. These children are more likely to struggle with language and literacy skills when they arrive at primary school than their peers.

Studies have shown that helping parents and giving them the confidence to work with their children on speech and language is one of the most effective ways to ensure children arrive at school with the right foundations for a successful education.

Projects that can bid for the funding could include home visits from trained early years professionals, to help parents support their children in learning new words through simple steps like reading and singing nursery rhymes. Or they could involve easy-to-use online tools that help broaden the vocabulary parents use with their children in these early years.

Research shows that where there is a 'word gap' – the gap in communication skills between disadvantaged children and their peers – it can have a long term impact on a child's education, so projects like these will help close it once and for all.

Education Secretary Damian Hinds said:

Giving every child the best start in life means making sure the right early development opportunities are in place. That starts in the home, which means giving parents the confidence to help their children read, learn new words and social skills at an early age.

Children from disadvantaged backgrounds or those with additional needs can face the greatest barriers in their early development, so it is important that where that help is needed it is in place as early as possible – such as through our free childcare for two-year-olds from lower income families which is used by more than 70% of those who are eligible.

This funding boost will go to organisations with a proven track record of breaking down learning barriers for children with additional needs. This is an important part of this government's

work to improve education for every child, to make sure that this is a country that truly works for everyone.

National voluntary and community groups will also be able to bid for funding to work with disadvantaged communities to encourage families to access the Government's early education offers for children under five, as evidence shows high-quality early education can have a lasting impact on a child's future.

Today's announcement builds on the £13.5 million [investment](#) announced in April to improve early language and literacy for disadvantaged children. This includes £5million for the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) to trial projects that support parents to help their children learn new words, and an £8.5 million programme for local authorities to make improvements in early learning for local communities.

Previous successful bidders from the scheme include the National Literacy Trust, a charity that trains early years staff and volunteers to work with families, building parents' confidence so that they can support their children's communication, language and literacy skills at home. The Trust used the grant funding to set up Early Years Together at 2, a programme which invites parents and carers into the nursery to watch how children learn, and gives them practical ideas of how they can continue this learning at home.

Tara Parker, Senior Programme Manager for Early Years at the National Literacy Trust, said:

We were thrilled to be selected by the Department for Education to receive the Early Years VCS Grant last year. The grant enabled us to help 130 parents develop the skills and confidence they need to better support their child's language and communication development at home.

We have already started to see great results, with the two-year-olds involved in the programme becoming more interested in and engaged with books and songs. We were able to train early years practitioners across 20 settings. Having reported improved confidence in supporting parents, most settings will continue to deliver the programme to help even more families beyond the funding period.

Grants have also been issued to the charity Home-Start UK, which works closely with families facing personal difficulties, which can have a negative effect on children's wellbeing and early development. The charity supports volunteers who work in communities, supporting families suffering from problems such as post-natal depression, physical health problems and bereavement. It received over £400,000 in grant funding to pilot a 'word pedometer' programme which provided disadvantaged families with coaching from trained home visiting volunteers, helping new parents increase the number and quality of words they use when interacting with their babies.

Rob Parkinson, chief executive, Home-Start UK:

We know the number of words children hear in their very first days, months and years has a huge impact on their development. The grant from the Department of Education has been instrumental in establishing the pilot of this programme. Home-Start home visiting volunteers have been specially trained to work with the [LENA Foundation's](#) word pedometer and resulting graphs, sharing them with the family in a positive and accessible way each week. The grant has been essential in being able to secure subsequent funding to help expand the project and giving us the opportunity to demonstrate its life-changing impact.

Funding will be awarded to organisations that can demonstrate that projects will be self-sustaining, to ensure they will last to support future generations of children.

The Department for Education is working to target resources where they can have the greatest success in helping the early development of children with special educational needs and from disadvantaged backgrounds. The competition opens to bidders from today (1 July).

Winning projects will be announced later this year and go live in October, running until 2020.